

VZCZCXRO9531
PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHIHL RUEHKUK
DE RUEHGB #1532/01 1290448
ZNY SSSSS ZZH
P 090448Z MAY 07
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1071
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 001532

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/29/2017
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: SCIRI STRATEGIC DIALOGUE: FIRST POLITICAL
COMMITTEE MEETING FOCUSES ON SUNNIS

REF: EMBASSY BAGHDAD CLASS 0/I 26APR07 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Political Counselor Margaret Scobey for reasons 1.4 (b)
and (d).

Summary

¶1. (S) At the first meeting of the political committee of the U.S.-SCIRI strategic dialogue (ref), both sides agreed to begin discussions by sharing their views on how each of Iraq's three major communities viewed the new Iraq. Most of the conversation focused on the Sunnis, with the SCIRI side arguing that the Sunnis had received genuine and generous opportunities to participate in the new Iraq and questioning when Sunni demands, and the violence, would ever stop. PolCouns noted that the new Sunni leaders and parties did not have the same experience and capacity as the leading Shi'a and Kurdish parties. She urged SCIRI leaders to continue seeking a Sunni partner, even if it meant making concessions. The group agreed to meet again after two weeks, with each side preparing a paper analyzing the positions of the three communities in the interim. End summary.

¶2. (S) The meeting took place on May 1. The SCIRI participants were Vice President Adel Abdel Mehdi (chair) and CoR members Sheikh Humam Hamoudi, Sheikh Jalal al-Din al-Sagheer, and Ridha Jawad Taqi. The U.S. side consisted of PolCouns (chair), Rule of Law Coordinator, Regional Affairs Officer, and PolOff. The committee chairs agreed that the committee would meet once every two weeks over a three month period.

Kurds, Sunni, Shi'a - Differing Visions on the New Iraq

¶3. (S) After briefly reviewing the papers each side had submitted, Abdel Mehdi stated that SCIRI was in complete agreement with the general principles the U.S. had enunciated (e.g. democracy, human rights, etc.) He suggested that the political committee dialogue begin with each side giving its analysis of the current situation in the new Iraq with respect to its three main communities. Were the Sunnis adjusted to the new Iraq, Abdel Mehdi asked. What sort of a map did the Kurds want? Were the Shi'a seeking to rule the others or to be partners? PolCouns agreed that these were the essential questions. There were three different narratives, she continued, showing that Iraqis had not yet agreed on the new Iraq. PolOff suggested that Iraq's Arab neighbors and Iran should also be factored in.

¶4. (S) Turning briefly to the Kurds, Abdel Mehdi noted that the Kurdish region had its own constitution and political institutions but implicitly questioned the Kurds' commitment to the Iraqi state. "We do not believe that non-Kurds in the Kurdish region should have lesser rights than Kurds do in

Baghdad," he stated. The Kurds' insistence on "historical rights" will lead to problems, he continued, noting that Article 140 left unanswered important questions on the nature and scope of the referendum. Abdel Mehdi asked what the Kurds wanted from the oil law, saying that SCIRI wanted oil to be for all Iraqis.

The Sunnis: What do They Want?

¶5. (S) Moving to the Sunnis, Abdel Mehdi said that some were complaining of marginalization, which may be a valid complaint, but others were undertaking terrorism. What, then, is the meaning of participation, he asked. Abdel Mehdi questioned why the Sunnis thought deBaathification reform so urgent. He claimed that of 95,000 officers and 115,000 civilians potentially affected, all but 15,000 officers and 17,000 civilians had returned to their jobs (or were receiving pensions). "Is it just 25,000 (sic) people we are talking about," he asked, noting these 25,000 might include terrorist elements. He questioned why the IIP and neighboring Arab countries, no friends of Saddam's regime, seemed to care so much about the Baathists.

¶6. (S) Building on Abdel Mehdi's speculation that the Sunnis essentially wanted veto authority, Hamoudi argued that there was "not a lot of opportunity to change the basic framework of Iraq," which had been set in the constitution. He noted that the constitution and other laws contained certain provisions "that trespass on the rights of the majority" but were accepted to assure the Sunnis that they had a place in the new Iraq. These provisions included a three-member Presidency Council during a four-year transitional period

BAGHDAD 00001532 002 OF 002

(effectively giving a representative of each community a means to block controversial legislation) and the need for two-thirds of the council of ministers to approve a given action. "What are the limits to their demands," al-Saghir asked. "When will they be satisfied? How much do we have to give to stop the violence?"

The Challenge of a Sunni Partner

¶7. (S) PolCouns noted in response that the Kurds had well-developed political institutions and strong, well-disciplined parties. Within the Shi'a community, she continued, SCIRI was also a longstanding, disciplined, and successful party. The Sunnis, however, did not have parties with a strong tradition; with the partial exception of the IIP, their parties were more ad-hoc and their leaders lacked political experience. The Sunnis now felt that they lacked real power, PolCouns said, particularly over the Iraqi military structure. She acknowledged the latent Shi'a fear of Baathists but argued that the Shi'a would have to continue seeking a Sunni partner and would have to continue to make concessions in the process. PolOff noted that the Sunnis could not be considered as one unified bloc. While some might never reconcile to the new Iraq, the challenge for the Shi'a was to attract those who were open to it closer to a shared vision. Abdel Mehdi acknowledged the need for a Sunni partner, saying that Shi'a leaders had even come to the conclusion that they needed a strong partner, not a weak one.

¶8. (S) As the meeting concluded, Hamoudi commented ironically that the Sunnis had been the major topic of conversation in a group established to explore a strategic partnership between the U.S. and the Shi'a. PolCouns noted that the U.S. counted on its partners in Iraq to take the difficult steps necessary to move Iraq forward politically. She and Abdel Mehdi agreed that each side would prepare a short paper for the next meeting outlining its views on where Iraq's three major communities stood in relationship to the

new Iraq.
SPECKHARD